School of Theology at Claremont
1001 1374910

THE OLD TESTAMENT UNDER FIRE.

BS
1188
B4

The Library

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT CLAREMONT

WEST FOOTHILL AT COLLEGE AVENUE
CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA

BS
1188
B4

3
847

THE
Old Testament Under Fire

BY

A. J. F BEHRENDS D.D.

BUTLER BIBLE-WORK COMPANY
85 BIBLE HOUSE
NEW YORK

Theology Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

378

The Old Testament Under Fire.

PRELIMINARY AND PERSONAL.

I HAVE been asked by the Editor of *The Christian Advocate* to contribute three papers dealing with the higher criticism of the Old Testament. In acceding to that request, I beg to say that I do not pose as a specialist. I have only a running acquaintance with the language in which the ancient Scriptures were written, sufficient for the purpose of forming an independent judgment, but not warranting acceptance on my part of the challenge of debate. I am even less concerned to appear as a defender of the Bible. The ark of God is not in danger. Moses and the prophets are too deeply imbedded in the life of modern history ever to be eliminated from it by the analytics of criticism. The discovery of new truth can result only in good; and he who deprecates or denounces criticism has already surrendered his faith, and has labeled himself the disciple of a blind traditionalism.

It is not an argument, therefore, which I propose to conduct. I am going to rise in class-meeting and tell my experience, the resultant conviction to which several years of patient and painstaking study have led me. My readers must excuse, therefore, the frequent use of the personal pronoun, which in the present case is really

an evidence of modesty. There came a time when I could no longer take my opinions at second hand from the critical specialists. Their differences among themselves were so many and so serious that the only escape from either agnosticism or a slavish following lay in independent search. That involved, as preparatory, the careful and repeated reading of the Old Testament in Hebrew. The price was a heavy one for one who had become rusty in the old Semitic tongue; but it must be ungrudgingly paid by every man who would be sure of his ground. The problems which criticism raises must not and can not be left to specialists. They must be canvassed by the men who occupy the pulpits, that they may speak with authority, though never with ostentation. They will be least obtruded into preaching by those who are most familiar with them. Still, the call of the hour is for preachers who can and do read the Hebrew of the Old Testament as readily and habitually as they read the Greek of the New. And the men who do that should and will preach the simplest Gospel.

CRITICISM LARGELY CONJECTURAL.

One thing which the last five years have taught me is that the questions which criticism raises cannot be settled by mere argument. Demonstration is out of the question. Probability is all that can be reached, and in the logic of probability much depends upon presuppositions and upon the personal peculiarities of the critic. There are no perfect eyes—some are even color-blind. There are no perfect ears—tones which to some are distinct and sweet may be faint and unmusical to others. There are no perfect critics—every man brings his temperament to the task. This is true of even textual criticism.

249

Tischendorf and Tregelles do not agree in their estimate of the relative importance of the ancient manuscripts. The text of the New Testament must remain uncertain so long as the original autographs are beyond our reach, and every intelligent Greek reader will exercise his liberty in the choice of renderings. The variations are confessedly of no practical importance, but they serve to show that there is considerable margin for the exercise of personal ingenuity and judgment. What convinces one man will not convince another, and an authoritative dictum cannot be reached. Much less can such a finality be reached in the literary criticism of the biblical documents. The principles of literary criticism have never been formulated. Where the attempt has been made, the results have often been squarely set aside by the facts. Genius has many moods, and does not work in a mechanical harness. Sometimes it crawls, and then suddenly it rises upon wings of power. Its vocabulary is not always the same. Its style changes. It shifts the point of observation. Its products are not of the same grade. Different readers will be attracted by different tones. Some will regard this, others will regard that, as distinctive and peculiar. The critic always carries his own tastes to the task of analysis and comparison. Long lists of words, peculiarities of style, philosophical or theological colorings, are always more or less uncertain as data of impregnable conclusions.

Hence, literary criticism has always revealed a wide margin of conjecture. Its theories have been working hypotheses, often overthrown when they seemed to have been firmly established. Some claim that the style of the Elohist is easiest of detection; others think that the style of the Jahvist has been preserved in the greatest purity;

others, again, contend that the Redactor has tampered with all styles, and made up a literary mosaic which makes it impossible to bring perfect order out of the confusion. Our work is reduced to happy guesses. And when this latter theory is maintained, simple-minded readers will conclude that the mysterious and mischievous Redactor may have been the original author, and not a compiler of separate and divergent documents, so that it might have been Moses as well as any one else. Literary criticism is not so simple a matter as it seems to be. It bristles with conjectures. It is far from being strictly scientific. Personality has its hidden and unfathomable depths. The stronger the personality, the more varied will be its expression. It is never safe to predict what another man may do, and how he will do it; nor what he will say, and how he will say it. We must understand all his susceptibilities and moods, and all their possible combinations; and this cannot be done *a priori*. The man must be judged by what he has done or written; he cannot first be measured, and his writings sifted and separated under the assumed formula. Time, too, must be taken into account. Half a century may completely revolutionize a man's style; and a change of work may produce the same result. Grant was a soldier, and Chief Magistrate of the nation. But his military orders and reports are very different from his inaugural addresses and annual messages. It would not be hard to prove that General Grant and President Grant could not have been the same person; but the learned criticism would be laughed out of court.

At present the argument from style is held in abeyance, and regarded as only supplementary; the appeal is to variety of contents and to difference in conception.

350

As if a poet could not write prose, and a prose author could not write poetry. Coleridge did both well. A man may be learned in the law, and be able also to make a popular address. The transition from one theme to another, with the inevitable accompaniment of a change in vocabulary, does not prove the agency of different authors. The point in all this is simply that literary criticism is so largely subjective and conjectural that one may be excused for shrugging his shoulders when it becomes dogmatic and censorious.

CRITICAL PROBLEMS INSOLUBLE.

A second lesson which I have learned is that while the present problems of the Old Testament are perfectly legitimate, their satisfactory solution is something which need not be looked for. No new Bible will be the outcome. Agreed as most critics are as to the quartet of documents in the Hexateuch, they are not sure of their original form and contents. Not one of them, we are told, exists in its original integrity and completeness. The Redactor has scissored them all. Not only are there four imperfect documents, but each document has been compiled from many sources, which is declared to be pre-eminently true of the Priest-code. Nor are the critics agreed as to the date and the relative antiquity of the documents. The older scholars placed the Elohist first, but the present school makes him the last in the line; and the inversion compels the claim that the poem of creation is an introduction to Genesis added by the latest of the great unknown four or by their editor.

The second chapter of Genesis is supposed to contain a duplicate account of the creation, and the history of the deluge is dissected as proving that two descrip-

tions have been bunglingly united. It may provoke a smile from some specialists, but honesty compels me to say that, while I have no prejudice against the analysis, the arguments advanced have not convinced me. The first and second chapters of Genesis do not seem to me to contain duplicate accounts of the creation. The second chapter is an advance upon the first. Professor Green appears to me to have fully answered President Harper. And I can discover no such contradictions or variations in the account of the deluge as is assumed and maintained. This may be because I am not a specialist, and am lacking in literary tact; but the independent reader will have to be taken into account if the specialist expects to give currency to his analysis. What has been said of exegesis is true of criticism, which is only a branch of exegesis, that its correctness must be determined by the intelligent consensus of Christendom.

More than this. The literary criticism of the Old Testament has ceased to trouble me, because I have a strong conviction that the problem upon which it is at work is hopelessly insoluble. The history of New Testament criticism affords an instructive example. The synoptic problem is the most intricate and fascinating of all questions of the later biblical literature. Every possible combination bas been suggested; the most exact and exhaustive analysis has been made; and the result is failure along the whole line. There is only conjecture; and the simplest theory is as good as any, that the gospels are independent of each other, though resting upon a common tradition, and that the sources from which they were compiled cannot now be tabulated. The authors have not given us their authorities and we cannot make good the literary omission.

The composition of the Pentateuch is a problem of tenfold greater difficulty. It lies much farther away from our time. We have no other writings of similar traditional antiquity with which to compare it. Its Mosaic authorship was once denied on the ground that the age was illiterate, and that writing was unknown. But recent discoveries in the valleys of the Nile and the Euphrates have exploded that assumption. Unless Moses be resolved into a purely mythical figure, he must have known how to write; and the consciousness of his peculiar vocation would have impelled him to write. How much did he write? What documents, and how many, did he have in his possession? Who can tell? He has not told us; and if he did not write a line, the men who did write the documents have not affixed their names, and they have not told us whence they derived their information. A modern writer takes pains to tell us what authorities he has consulted, and adds numerous notes to the text. But the Pentateuch has neither note nor appendix. Nearly twenty-five hundred years have passed since the exile; and if Ezra knew anything of these matters he has given no sign. Take any modern book, with all contemporary literature at our command, but with no quotation marks or confessions of indebtedness, would not the literary analysis of its sources be a task of great difficulty? But the sources of the Hexateuch and of the historical books have no independent existence. Comparison cannot be made. Such documents as existed have long since perished. Is it not a Gordian knot over which the critics are breaking their finger-nails, and who is the Alexander that he should cut the knot with the sword, and then claim that he had untied it? Apart from tradition, the

literary problem is insoluble ; and the only question of importance is whether the record as it stands bears upon it the stamp of general truthfulness.

LITERARY CRITICISM SUBORDINATE TO HISTORICAL.

The third lesson which I have learned is, that the literary criticism of the biblical documents is, in grave and essential importance, subordinate to the historical criticism of their contents. In fact, literary criticism may almost be said to have become the servant of historical criticism. The crucial question is, whether the Old Testament is substantially correct in the account which it gives of the rise and development of true religion, and of its culmination in the Messiah of law and psalm and prophecy. And here there is a subtle quality in its literary substance and form which wins my confidence the more familiar I become with it. It is pervaded by a high ethical tone. It does not picture ideal heroes. It sketches the shame as well as the glory, and both with literary simplicity. It exalts the veracity of God—His personal veracity as holiness, and His veracity in dealing with men, as remembering and keeping His covenant. The prophets never flatter. They speak words of truth and soberness. A lying history could not have been written by men breathing such an atmosphere. Be the difficulties of harmonizing what they may, were they tenfold greater than they are, they do not and could not compare with the monstrosity of a forged and false history issuing from men who hated and denounced lying. But more. One thing criticism has been forced to grant: There was a Moses. His was the commanding and creative personality. He planted the acorn, if he did not create the wide-branching tree.

The theology and the ritual of the Old Testament bear his impress. There was an ark, and a tent, and sacrifices, and a written law, before there was a temple. Monotheism was not a product of the prophetic era. It was present and active from the very first, though only in germ, as a religious force rather than a theological dogma, and though it required many centuries and many a severe struggle to give it exclusive and universal ascendancy. So much stands, whatever reconstruction of the history is ventured upon. The nation was right when it said: "Abraham is our father, and Moses our lawgiver." And, with so much granted, a good deal more will have to be yielded. The revolutionary criticism seems to have reached its limits, and it is already retreating to a more moderate position, where the prophets will not be left without a theological ancestry, and where the second temple will not be made the creation of Ezekiel's fancy and of Ezra's manipulation.

UNWARRANTABLE ASSUMPTIONS OF DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM.

The fourth lesson which I have learned is, that historical criticism of the Old Testament, so far as its results are revolutionary and destructive, proceeds upon utterly unwarrantable assumptions. It denies the reality of supernatural revelation and guidance. It sneers at miracles, and discredits any history which contains them. It resolves predictions into happy guesses, or regards them as uttered *post eventum*. It claims that, where a law is generally disregarded and violated, the statute could not have existed. It insists that a steady upward evolution is the universal law of history, and that Israel there

fore could not have fallen from monotheism into idolatry, but must have risen from fetichism into monotheism. Taking so much for granted, the attempt to prove the recorded history misleading and incredible is a needless task. But every one of these assumptions is unscientific, and is discredited by history. Revelation is a permanent feature of life, as our ethical intuitions and religious aspirations prove. Conscience is the mightiest of forces, supporting the authority of moral law as uncreated and eternal; and conscience and moral law bring all life into living contact with the supernatural and spiritual. God is immanent in the life of the world. Theism granted, and miracles are possible, while the resurrection of Jesus Christ blocks the path of every man who ventures upon their universal rejection. All history is luminous with ethical ideals which have been widely disregarded. The golden rule is not even now obeyed; did not Christ then utter the words? And is it true that an unbroken line of upward development is the story which history tells? Its pages are full of the record of political and religious apostasies. The early days of Greece were the best. The first centuries of Rome were the brightest. Primitive Christianity was better than its mediæval type, and our theological reformers make the cry, "Back to Christ," their watchword. The record of the Old Testament religion corresponds, in its broad outlines, to the general history of the world, a constant and fierce battle, a succession of apostasies and reformations. Destructive criticism discredits its own results by its unhistorical and unscientific assumptions; and as the foundations are laid in the quicksand, the elaborate superstructure is doomed to collapse without the cost and the fatigue of bombardment. When historical criticism ceases to make

its conclusions the premises of its argument, it will be time enough to take it seriously.

CHARGES OF LITERARY FORGERY.

I pass to a fifth point. If the philosophical postulates of destructive criticism are unscientific and unhistorical, the conscious and wholesale literary immorality which it charges upon the biblical writers provokes the resentment of every fair-minded student. It would not be so bad if the literature were evaporated into romance. But it is branded as counterfeit and as deliberately reversing the order of facts, as transferring to ancient times what was an afterthought and a late priestly invention. Deuteronomy is declared not to have been found in Josiah's reign by Hilkiah, but to have been written by him, and palmed off upon the king and the nation as a creditable record of what Moses said and commanded in the plains of Moab. We are told that this pious act must not be condemned as forgery, because literary methods were not as strict as they now are, and that wholesale plagiarism was universally practiced; that speeches were credited to men which they never uttered, and which only represented what the author imagined they might or must have said; and that the emergency which confronted Josiah was such that extraordinary measures were required to meet it. But we look in vain, through the ethics of the prophetical literature which confessedly was in existence at that time, for any intimation that the end justifies the means. Every prophet would have denounced the maxim; and this prophetic environment makes it incredible that so stupendous a literary invention, upon which the political fortunes of so many

depended, could have been undertaken and carried forward to success. The audacity of the priest amazes one, and the stupidity of the people passes comprehension. Was there no way of determining whether Hilkiah's roll was an old or a new one? It was not kept under lock and key. It was read not only to Shaphan, the scribe, as a co-conspirator, but also to the king, who was not let into the secret, and then to large public assemblies which the king summoned. Friends and foes of the reform movement were present, saw, and heard, and not a voice was lifted against the solemn covenant which was publicly entered into over this roll which Hilkiah had produced; and yet it was all an invention! Seriously, what shall be said of such historical criticism?

Much in the same way the middle books of the Pentateuch are declared to be a post-exilian product, the work of an ambitious priesthood, who dressed up their ordinances in the literary garments of the wilderness life to give them easy currency among the people, and then invented the whole series of patriarchal stories as a fitting imaginary introduction. Moses cannot be regarded as the author even of the Decalogue. To admit that would involve the high antiquity of the first chapter of Genesis. The Psalter is brought down bodily to the period of the second temple, and David vanishes from its pages altogether. Joel cannot possibly be allowed a place among the older prophets, because his testimony to the ancient ritual is too varied and explicit. Chronicles is a priestly fabrication throughout, and wholly unworthy of credence. If similar passages are found in Judges and Kings, subtle, artless, and undesigned coincidences, they are quietly checked off as interrupting the narrative, introducing irrelevant ideas and interpolations by an

unknown priestly redactor. Such critical judgments would be strange enough if the books in question were only private pamphlets, having a narrow and official circulation. But the hypothesis is a most monstrous one when it is applied to documents which constituted a popular literature, which passed into many hands and were freely circulated, and which were divided into pericopes and regularly read in a thousand synagogues. As well suppose that *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Arabian Nights* will ever be read in our churches with the gospels and the epistles. The theory brings the indictment of forgery against the entire nation, a supposition so violent that it needs only to be plainly stated to be instantly and indignantly rejected. The nation's imprimatur will count for something with every reader who has no particular theory to defend. He may find difficulties and discrepancies, as he does in any similar historical record, but he cannot regard the entire literature a lie.

The tortuous way in which even moderately conservative critics deal with Hilkiah's discovery of Deuteronomy has a tendency to create a profound distrust of the literary ethics of the critical procedure. Canon Driver and Professor Briggs shrink from the plain charges of forgery preferred by Kuenen and Wellhausen, but they save the honesty of the main actors in the scene only by somewhat minimizing their crime, and by the use of dexterous phrases, which they imagine convert the procedure into something legitimate and praiseworthy. Canon Driver intimates that the kernel of Deuteronomy is old and of Mosaic origin, but that its "parenetic setting" belongs to the age of Josiah, and that it may be described as the "prophetic reformulation and adaptation to new needs of an older legislation." Professor

Briggs is somewhat more blunt when he says that Hilkiah is not the author of the Deuteronomic Code, but of "a new codification of an ancient code," of an ancient code which was found, and which after its discovery was cast into a new historical form. His theory is that "an ancient Mosaic code was discovered in Josiah's time, and that the code was put into a popular rhetorical form as a people's law book for practical purposes under the authority of king, prophet, and priest." This, we are told, we are at liberty to "*suppose.*" Certainly, and we may suppose a great many more things, without a scintilla of evidence, and squarely in the face of the record. The roll, whatever it may have contained, is said to have been found, and to have been read, *as found*, to Shaphan, to the king, and to the people. There is no intimation of a recodification, or of the addition of a new "parenetic setting." It does not help the matter to say that the literary forgery was only in the dress. Coin is none the less counterfeit because it contains a little genuine metal. If we may suppose that the parenetic setting was invented, why must we suppose the code to have been ancient? Whatever date may be assigned to Deuteronomy, assuming Hilkiah's roll to have been the original Deuteronomy—which cannot be proved—it would seem to be clear that there cannot be any middle ground between its being a wholesale literary fraud and its discovery in its present form in Josiah's reign. Its present parenetic setting may have been given to it long after Moses, but to regard the parenetic setting as a later literary artifice, and the attempt to associate that setting with the discovery of an ancient code by Hilkiah, is substantially a surrender to Wellhausen. It is not so intended; but plain men will not be able to make anything else out

355

of it. The critics mean well, but they show a strange ethical twist when they deceive themselves by phrases and conjectures whose emptiness appears as soon as they are stripped of their rhetoric.

RECENT LEADERS OF THE MEDIATING SCHOOL.

The deserved prominence of Professor Briggs as a biblical critic, and the wide attention which his utterances and trial have commanded, justify a brief reference to his last book as outlining his present position. In it he professes to have given the results of twenty-seven years of critical study, and Christian scholarship had a right to expect as strong and conclusive an argument as it was possible for him to give. Candor compels me to say that the reader is doomed to bitter disappointment, and can only close the volume with the certain conviction that the author has not solved the problems of Old Testament criticism. The book is a strange medley, consisting of several documents of earlier publication, which have been amended, expanded, or contracted, with numerous interpolations of sentences and paragraphs, and with equally numerous reversals of previous judgments. It is practically an abandonment of the conservative ground which the author held ten years ago, a conservatism which at that time was regarded as dangerous liberalism. At that earlier period he had already occupied a professor's chair for fourteen years, and had been a specialist in Old Testament studies for seventeen years. He had mastered the literature of the whole subject, and the theories of Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen had long been familiar to scholars. Ten years ago his judgment of the composition and authorship of the Pentateuch was stated in these words:

"There is nothing in the variation of the documents, as such, to require that they should be successive and separated by wide intervals, or that would prevent their being very nearly contemporaneous. There is nothing in the distinction of the documents, as such, that forbids the Mosaic age as the time of their origin."

On the date of Deuteronomy Professor Briggs declared in 1883, that De Wette's theory was "exceedingly precarious." He claimed to have disproved, against De Wette, the location of Deuteronomy in the age of Josiah, and to have shown that its origin must be thrown back into the Mosaic age. As to the post-exilian origin of the Priest Code he maintained that there "were insuperable objections" to such a theory, and he presented his reasons in detail. He admitted the *order* of development, for which Kuenen and Wellhausen contended, but he denied "that it was necessary to postulate a thousand years for this development," and he suggested that "if we should suppose that Eleazar or some other priest gathered these detailed laws and groups of laws into a code at the time subsequent to the conquest, all the conditions of variation and development might be explained."

Between this and the contention of 1893 the gulf is deep and wide. The last book displays no greater learning than the earlier essay, and in logical vigor it is decidedly inferior. His last volume has certainly not added to his reputation. Its learning is undigested. The material is chaotic. The tone of argument is not judicial. There is a painful want of logical clearness and consistency. Ingenious suggestions take the place of proof. Dangerous and revolutionary theories are modified by a personal caveat. Their logical issue is

simply evaded. Names are made to take the place of evidence. The reader is overawed by a list of authorities, in which all schools are indiscriminately jumbled together. The counter arguments are in the main ignored, and conservative critics are labeled in schoolboy fashion. The reader who can divest himself of prejudice lays down the book with the feeling that, if this is the best that can be said, the problem has not even been clearly stated, and that its solution is a long way off. And the same judgment must be passed upon Canon Driver's book, which Professor Briggs speaks of as "invaluable," many a page of which bristles with assumptions for which not the slightest evidence is given. The critical processes are reverential in spirit, but they are very far from being severely scientific; and the historical criticism is thoroughly loose and arbitrary. The traditional view of the origin of the present Pentateuch may require modification, but the present mediating school cannot be said to have defended the credibility of the Old Testament, and its claim to being the record of a divine revelation, against the assaults of the destructive critics.

Perhaps one of the fairest specimens of the present mediating school which seeks to retain the divine authority of the Old Testament as a gradually unfolding religious revelation, while regarding the literature as a late production, largely composed of mythical and legendary elements, and worthless in many parts as historical material, is the treatise on *Old Testament Theology*, by Dr. Hermann Schultz, of Göttingen, a work now accessible to English readers. The tone is calm and the spirit is reverent. The reality of a divine revelation in the production of the ancient faith is conceded and

maintained, as demanded by the conditions of the problem to be solved. Monotheism in a religious form is affirmed to have been the pre-Mosaic faith in Israel, though Moses did much to give it prominence, while the prophets are credited with giving it theological form. The deliverance from the bondage of Egypt is regarded as an historical fact, as everywhere assumed, inextricably interwoven with all the subsequent history, though the miracles are passed over in silence. Moses cannot be a myth. He is not the author of the Decalogue in its present form, because the stern prohibition against the use of images in divine worship points unmistakably to a later period, though in some form the Ten Commandments must be acknowledged as the basis of his legislation. There was an ark which was sheltered by a tent, though the tabernacle is the creation of later poetic fancy; its description being "not a delineation of an actual thing, but a depicting of religious thoughts borrowed from Solomon's temple." The presence of the ark gave to Israel from the first a national sanctuary, outranking in dignity all local altars, and in that sanctuary no image ever found a place, though the exclusive dignity of the sacred shrine which contained the ark dates from a much later period, to which David, Solomon, and other kings, contributed. The tribe of Levi is conceded to have been a priestly class from the beginning, though not to the exclusion of other individuals, and without such an organization as appears in the middle books of the Pentateuch. Sacrifice is an early institution. The feasts of tabernacles and of the passover are of Mosaic origin. Circumcision is a pre-Mosaic custom and religious in its meaning, as a consecration of life to God.

This hasty review shows how much the historical analysis feels constrained to grant as a basis upon which the great prophetic era must rest. The edifice of the ninth century before Christ, as represented by the older prophets and by Isaiah, and by the cultus of the exile, must have some solid foundation in the ancient era. The argument is unanswerable, and its lines have been skillfully followed by Professor Robertson, of Glasgow. But it is hard to see how Schultz can concede so much, while contending that the literature of the Old Testament is trustworthy only as showing what was believed when that literature was produced, and that it cannot be relied upon as an historical record. The concessions are at war with the criticism. It is only an individual opinion which remains, unsupported by documentary evidence, and such an opinion can have no authority. Every man is at liberty to apply the brakes anywhere, or to refuse applying them anywhere. Whatever the picture of the Mosaic age, it must be drawn from the literature as it now exists, a literature which, as a whole, is discredited by Schultz as much as it is by Wellhausen. That literature is confessedly homogeneous, as even Ewald insisted; and it would seem that if the literature is false *in totis*, it cannot be reliable *in singulis*. Some, with Vernes, have taken that step, and declare that the entire history is legendary, and that the Mosaic era must remain for us a splendid national myth. And, to me at least, the herculean labors of the mediating school seem to be an attempt to arrest Niagara by a dam of straw.

REAL DIFFICULTIES OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM.

The difficulties and the discrepancies which emerge in a critical examination of the Scripture records are con-

nected with the minor details of the narrative, and with the fragmentary nature of the literature in which the history has been preserved. One peculiarity of that literature is that it is prophetic, not photographic. It seizes upon the great outstanding facts in which the divine discipline of the race, and especially of the chosen people, is most clearly manifest, and by which the preparation for the advent of Jesus Christ is most signally illustrated. The Bible is written in a large way, not in the method of minute descriptive and chronological completeness. We are conducted over a series of mountain peaks, while the broad intervening valleys are left shrouded in mist and gloom. The lives of the patriarchs are fragmentary sketches. The bondage in Egypt occupies only a paragraph. We look in vain for a biography of Moses, whose personal discipline of eighty years must have had an important bearing upon his subsequent public career. The story reads abruptly, but the abruptness is due to the silence which covers the formative years. Thirty-eight years of the wilderness life are passed over in silence, and we might argue from the silence that they are a legendary addition, while, if the silence were removed, the lost background of the priestly legislation might be recovered. Judges, Samuel and Kings do not furnish complete histories. Here and there we come upon sharp and severe conflicts between monotheism and idolatry, without any intimation as to the relative strength of the opposing parties, and without any sketch of the intervening periods. Even when altars multiplied, and sacrifices were offered on a hundred heights, a central sanctuary remained, with its tabernacle and ark and altar, as in Samuel's time, and in the period of the kings. The ritual in use is not

described; but the same silence characterizes the mention of idolatrous forms of worship, though we know that these were in charge of a priesthood, and must have been associated with a regular and imposing ceremonial. There was always a remnant which resisted the popular current, and that remnant always appealed to ancient usage. Royal authority might seize the temple and corrupt the priesthood and ignore the ancient feasts; but the fact that repeated attempts were made to correct these abuses proves that the remembrance of the older order never wholly perished.

If in Elijah's time, when Ahab and Jezebel ruled in Samaria, seven thousand had not bowed the knee to Baal, we may confidently presume that much larger numbers retained the primitive faith under better kings. The fact that royal authority so often, and for such long periods, stood in the way of a general and orderly observance of the appointed feasts and sacrifices, does not prove that there existed universal ignorance of an ancient and Mosaic ritual, much less that such a ritual had never been instituted. The fragmentariness of the record deprives the argument from silence of its adverse weight, and the final triumph of the monotheistic doctrine and of the centralized ritual implies their presence from the earliest stages of the religious conflict. That there should be variant accounts of the long periods, as when Chronicles and Kings are compared, is not surprising, when we bear in mind that no writer has given a complete account of any single event or reign; and hence, to pit Judges and Samuel against the Pentateuch, and Kings against Chronicles, and the prophets against the Priest Code, is a thoroughly unscientific procedure. That there are difficulties in harmonizing the accounts is

freely granted, and the task of historical reconstruction is not an easy one; but the problem is certainly not solved by arraying the records against each other, by throwing the accessible materials into inextricable confusion, and by charging the writers with manipulating and even inventing the facts in support of their theories.

Similar difficulties confront us in harmonizing the evangelistic narratives and in reproducing the exact history of the early Church. The gospels and the Acts are fragmentary records, and leave many questions unanswered. If we had only the Synoptists, we might conclude that our Lord's public ministry lasted only a single year. The fourth gospel compels us to adopt a different chronology. There are varying reports of the same miracles, of the Lord's Prayer, of the Sermon on the Mount, and of Christ's dying utterances. The different accounts of the resurrection of our Lord cannot be harmonized. It was not within the range of human possibility to give a perfectly accurate or photographic description of so momentous an event. The resurrection itself, like the creation or incarnation, was an invisible and inscrutable miracle. No one saw the Crucified rising from the sepulcher. The agreement is perfect that Christ was seen after He had risen from the dead, and that is the only thing of importance. Who was first at the grave, and whether there were two angels or only one, are matters of insignificance. So, while there is general agreement between the narrative in Acts and the Pauline epistles, there are minor details which present difficulties in completely harmonizing the different accounts. Such imperfections belong to all historical literature. Its credibility is limited to the general lines of movement; variant and even contradictory accounts

appear as soon as unimportant details are brought into the story. There is no agreement as to the hour of day on which the battle of Waterloo was fought; *but Waterloo was fought.* There are square contradictions as to the place where Bismarck and Napoleon met at Sedan; *but Napoleon surrendered at Sedan.* The main fact is not discredited by the variant and even contradictory testimony concerning minor details. It would be easy, adopting the methods of the current Old Testament criticism, to discredit the entire traditional history of the Plymouth Colony, and to resolve it into an admixture of fact and fiction by pitting the writings of Bradford against those of Winslow, and by showing that in some particulars Bradford's history is contradicted by his *Letter Book.*

GENERAL CREDIBILITY THE ONLY RESULT OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM.

General credibility—credibility in the main outlines—is all that can be demanded of historical and biographical literature. He who exacts more may as well turn his back upon all the historians, even the most painstaking and conscientious of them. Are we to look for anything more in an inspired writer? That question may be answered dogmatically in the affirmative. It may be assumed that the biblical history must be complete and absolutely inerrant in every slightest detail. But the assumption is contradicted by the facts. There are incomplete and variant accounts, and thus far the differences have refused to melt together in the critical crucible. General credibility is all that we can claim, and, whether it suits our dogmatic position or not, we must be content with it. It certainly is a reversal of all

scientific and sensible criticism to seize upon the variations in the historical narrative, and by their use to discredit the entire record and to reverse its general movement; as unreasonable and absurd as it would be to make the battle of Waterloo a fiction, or to convert Bismarck and Napoleon into legendary persons, because the accounts of different eye-witnesses do not agree. Few things are more important for the critical study of the Bible than a liberal supply of downright common sense; and when historical criticism parts with common sense, applying tests to Scripture which would not be applied to any other historical literature, the critical results are discredited in advance. Variations in historical details ought not to be an obstacle to faith. They are watermarks of general veracity and evidence of independent testimony; they prove that there was no collusion. It may be that other and graver difficulties face us in Holy Scripture as a trial to our faith, to purge it, to teach us the important lesson that the letter killeth, while only the spirit maketh alive. The Bible, after all, is the handbook of redemption. It tells us "how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go." It has been given us to make us wise unto salvation, and to perfectly equip us for every service in righteousness. This has been its great and mighty mission in the past, and the past is sufficient to vindicate its unique dignity and authority. That mission let us push with an undying ardor, until its message of hope has won all hearts, and made the face of the round earth radiant with its eternal joy.

332946

26d

Behrends, Adolphus Julius Frederick, 1839-190
The Old Testament under fire / by A.J.F. Be
rends. -- New York : Butler Bible-Work, [189-
26p. ; 18cm.

1. Bible. O.T.--Criticism, interpretation,
--History--19th century. I. Title.

32946

CCSC/mmb